

METUCHEN DOWNTOWN ALLIANCE MINUTES

February 14, 2020

8:30 A.M.

In attendance: Eric Berger, Jay Muldoon, Stuart Schooler (on phone), Bobbie Theivakumaran, Leon Schwartz, Mark Harris, Gary Tilbor, Diana Callinan, Linda Koskoski, Sue Fitzgerald and Jenny Lai. Not present: Gary Wade. Guest: Mo Atzbi. Staff: Isaac Kremer.

Eric Berger opened the meeting. Motion was made to approve the January, 2020 board meeting minutes. Motion passed.

Chairman's Report

Eric Berger reported:

- The Annual Meeting held in January was well attended and several awards were presented to volunteers, member businesses and Board Service award to Jay Muldoon.
- There is an open District Owner (property owner) board seat that needs to be filled. Suggestions were made for potential people and follow-up by Nominating Team will take place.

Secretary's Report

- No report.

Treasurer's Report

- No report.

Executive Director's Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- The MDA is planning to submit a \$15,000 grant request to AARP Livable Communities, due April 1, 2020. The target area for improvements is the pedestrian walkway at the end of Pearl St which leads to the train station parallel to the train tracks. The goal is to improve lighting, safety and attractiveness of this well used area.
- The Cultural Trust Fund has grants that support the arts and historic preservation. Isaac is thinking that the former Danford building, currently vacant, at the corner of Main and Middlesex Ave might qualify for funding. The idea is to restore the façade to its prior condition in hopes it would help get the space rented. Isaac passed around a document he plans to include in the grant request that highlights some of the MDA's accomplishments. Sue Fitzgerald asked if the document could be shared. Isaac agreed to send Sue a copy.
- Isaac described his efforts to help fill the vacancies in the downtown district.

Public Art Team Report

Eric Berger reported:

- The team is finalizing their plans for 2020 and will meet the first week of March.
- The MDA received a \$5,000 grant from Middlesex County for a downtown mural and Jonathan Horowitz, muralist from Highland Park, has been selected to do the mural.

Storefront Team Report

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- Working with businesses on approvals for new grants.

Tech Team Report

Isaac Kremer reported:

- No report.

Promotion Team Report

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- Valentine's promotion is underway.
- Downtown Goes Green is scheduled for April 25.
- Planning underway for Downtown Loves Mom event in May. Exploring including a wine or mimosa tent.
- JAM Metuchen event being planned for May 9 to promote reduction in use of plastics at local businesses in conjunction with Environmental Commission.

Parking Team Report

Eric Berger reported:

- Parking team met on February 13, 2020. Nexus will be doing a study of all public and private facilities to identify ways to optimize and maximize parking in the lots. Study will be done in March and April when lots are better utilized compared to the winter months. Report and recommendations expected in June.
- Mike Harris had shared information about Rahway's valet program which Eric shared with the Team. They felt Metuchen isn't ready or in need of a valet program at this point. Our parking supply is adequate but needs to be better managed. A map of available parking options is needed and better communication to residents and visitors.
- Nexus reported that on most Tuesday – Thursday mornings the deck is filled to capacity and is closed from approximately 8:30am – 9:30am after which spaces become available due to Woodmont residents vacating.
- Discussion was held about the continuing problem of downtown employees parking and feeding the meters on Main St. This prevents customers from parking on Main St and contributes to the parking problem downtown.

Communications Team Report

Bobbie Theivakumaran reported:

- At the January meeting Diana Callinan was elected as Chair and Dan Cea is Vice Chair. Jay Muldoon will continue to serve on the Team.
- The Team decided to pursue a series of videos that feature products, offerings and menu times being prepared/constructed. The first one will feature signature dishes prepared by various chefs in Metuchen.
- The Team will also work to help member businesses improve their use of social media to build their businesses. Show them how to push out and share the videos produced by the MDA and how to cross promote with other MDA businesses.

Chamber Report

Leon Schwartz reported:

- Chamber general meeting will be held on February 25, 2020.
- Upcoming ribbon cutting for Wolfe Ossa law firm.
- Networking night will be held on March 25, 2020.
- The Chamber will be producing a 2020 – 2021 full color Magazine and Membership Directory. Ad sales will start in March. It will provide information about Metuchen and Chamber businesses and will also be fundraiser for the Chamber. The Directory will be widely distributed at Chamber events throughout the year. Leon distributed flyer about the directory.

Arts Council Report

Mark Harris reported:

- Art Cycle event was held on January 4, 2020 at Westerhoff.
- The schedule of upcoming events was distributed.
- The Tiny X project is being planned in conjunction with the Public Arts Team.
- The public art classes at the Senior Center are starting this week.

Nominating Team

- No report.

Old Business

None to report.

New Business

Diana said the gas and water utilities are not giving businesses adequate notice before they cut off services. Jay stated that the water shut off last weekend was due to an emergency situation so advance notice was not possible. Jay said he would inform the companies to better communicate prior to starting scheduled work.

The NJ Symphony Orchestra will be doing a concert on the Plaza on June 27, 2020. It is being sponsored by Hackensack Meridian Health. There was discussion about having MDA restaurants set up vending stands for the event.

The Farmers Market is offering a space at the weekly markets to the MDA to highlight businesses and events.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20am.

The next Board meeting will be Friday, March 13, 2020, 8:30am at Hailey's.

Submitted by Jay Muldoon